



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**FACTORS AFFECTING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: A STUDY
AT A LOCAL UNIVERSITY**

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**FACTORS AFFECTING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: A STUDY AT A
LOCAL UNIVERSITY**

ONG PEI HOON

**This project is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
Bachelor of Science with Honours
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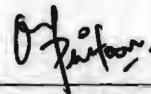
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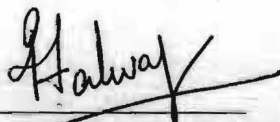


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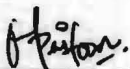
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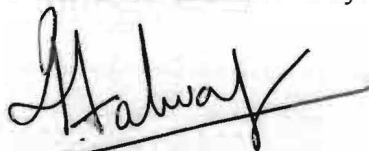
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ABSTRACT

FACTORS AFFECTING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: A STUDY AT A LOCAL UNIVERSITY

Ong Pei Hoon

In the era of globalization, environment possess of high level of uncertainties because of the rapid inventions and changes in technology. In order to prepare employees to adapt with readily environmental changes for securing organizational success, several motivation factors needed for engaging these employees. Here comes the purpose of study which aims to determine the level of engagement among lecturers at a local university in Malaysia. Next, this study strives to identify factors which will foster employee engagement as well as the relevant challenges to engage employees engagement. Lastly, the causes of disengagement are discovered. While the significant attention has been made on the concept of employee engagement, most of the studies were conducted quantitatively. Besides, there is no known study has been carried out to study the employee engagement among academic staffs in a local university of Malaysia. Hence, the research was conducted qualitatively with purposive sampling method to explore the insights of academic staffs regarding to employee engagement. It was found that intrinsic factor such as self-satisfaction, personal interest and passion is the dominant factor of to engage employees. Meanwhile, job stressor such as teaching, thesis or publication production and administration is the main challenge identified to engage employees in role performance. People are the only factor determined to be the cause of disengagement. Lastly, summarization, implication, limitations and recommendations for this study are elaborated for readers to review.

ABSTRAK

FAKTOR-FAKTOR MEMPENGARUHI PENGLIBATAN PEKERJA: SATU KAJIAN DALAM UNIVERSITI AM

Ong Pei Hoon

Dalam era globalisasi ini, persekitaran mempunyai tahap ketidakpastian yang tinggi kerana kepesatan dalam ciptaan dan perubahan dalam teknologi. Dalam usaha menyediakan pekerja untuk menyesuaikan diri dalam alam sekitar dinamik bagi menjamin kejayaan organisasi, faktor-faktor motivasi diperlukan untuk meningkatkan penglibatan pekerja-pekerja. Hal yang sedemikian telah mengilakkan kelahiran satu kajian yang bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti ciri-ciri penglibatan di kalangan pensyarah di sebuah universiti tempatan di Malaysia. Seterusnya, kajian ini berusaha untuk mengenal pasti faktor-faktor yang akan menggalakkan penglibatan pensyarah dan juga cabaran-cabaran yang akan menjejaskan penglibatan pensyarah. Akhir sekali, punca-punca yang mengakibatkan pengunduran pekerja dikenal pasti. Walaupun perhatian yang ketara telah dibuat pada konsep penglibatan pekerja, kebanyakan kajian telah dijalankan secara kuantitatif. Selain itu, tidak ada kajian yang dikenali telah dijalankan untuk mengkaji penglibatan pekerja di kalangan staf-staf akademik di universiti tempatan Malaysia. Oleh kerana itu, kajian ini telah dijalankan secara kualitatif dengan kaedah persampelan bertujuan untuk meninjau pandangan kakitangan akademik mengenai penglibatan pekerja. Kajian ini telah mendapati bahawa faktor intrinsik seperti kepuasan diri, minat peribadi dan semangat adalah faktor dominan untuk meningkatkan penglibatan pekerja. Sementara itu, tekanan yang berasal daripada kerja seperti pengajaran, pengeluaran tesis atau penerbitan dan pengurusan pentadbiran adalah cabaran utama yang dikenal pasti untuk melibatkan kakitangan dalam prestasi peranan. Mana kala orang merupakan satu-satu faktornya yang akan mengakibatkan pengunduran pekerja. Akhir sekali, rumusan, implikasi, had dan cadangan untuk kajian ini diuraikan setelitinya supaya menyenangkan pembaca untuk mengkaji semula kandungan kajian ini.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces essential information regarding to this research. It explains about the background of the study, reveals the problem statement, stating the objectives, research questions, and listing the definitions of terms which are used throughout this research before ended with a conclusion.

1.1 Background of Study

The purpose of conducting this research is attempting to study engagement characteristics among lecturers at a faculty of a local university. This research aims to determine the engagement characteristics among lecturers, to identify the factors that engage lecturers who are working under the same faculty of a local university, to find out the challenges for them to be engaged to their current employers, and to discover the causes of disengagement if they had experienced.

Nowadays, the innovation of technology has made the world to be the fast-paced era of globalization. Dynamic organizations with smaller human capital are developed in this border less world in order to adapt with rapid changes occurred in the environment, to survive and success in stiff competition. For an organization to develop, motivating employees to contribute their discretionary efforts in their job for organizational success become undoubtedly essential. Thus, the notion of employee engagement has been the topic of

interest among researchers and studies in recent years (Lewis, A., Thomas, & Bradley, 2012; Rasheed et al., 2013; Saks, 2006).

O'Byrne (2013) stated that the history of the employee engagement concept needs to be traced back over 20 years ago. Before that, employees' satisfaction and employees' commitment were studied (O'Byrne, 2013). However, O'Byrne (2013) mentioned that researchers found that there was insignificant relationship of employees' satisfaction with their performance. Besides, employees' commitment can be measured through the behaviours exhibited by employees (O'Byrne, 2013). Thus, the notion of employee engagement was developed. According to O'Byrne (2013), the paper which published by the Institute of Employment Studies (IES) in 1990 '*From People to Profits, the HR link to the service-profit chain*' illustrated that the improvements made in customer retention and sales performance were affected by employee attitudes and behaviour. Thus, the obvious relationship between engagement and performance, proven by extensive studies, assisted the formation of the idea that engagement is crucial to both human resource and business performances.

The significant study regarding to the factors that affecting engagement was carried out by Kahn on the psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work (Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane, & Truss, 2008; Saks, 2006). In his research, Kahn (1990) defined personal engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance" (p.694). Kahn (1990) stated that there are three psychological conditions which are related to engagement namely meaningfulness, safety, and availability.

There are several groups of scholars also have the similar view with Kahn regarding to the term of 'Engagement'. Andrew and Sofian (as cited in Kataria, Garg & Rastogi, 2013, p. 102) mentioned that engagement involves adhering to the organization's objectives and strategies at workplace while utilizing of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral energies actively.

According to Vance (2006), the definition of employee engagement varies across different researchers, consultancies, and organizations. In his study, Caterpillar defined engagement is "the extent of employees' commitment, work effort, and desire to stay in an organization" (p.3). Meanwhile, Kenexa (as cited in Vance, 2006) mentioned that engagement as the level of which employees are inspired to apply extra attempts in term of time, brainpower and energy to completing tasks that are vital to attain organizational goals and success. Whereas, Towers Perrin stated that engagement is the degree by which

employees put effort in the form of time, brainpower or energy which beyond the required minimum into their work in order to get the job completed (Vance, 2006). Besides, engagement is defined as an encouraging, satisfying, work-related state of mind that is characterized by energy, enthusiasm, and interest (Schaufeli et al. as cited in Saks, 2006).

Currently, the study done by Aon Hewitt (2013) stated that there are 40% of international employees are passive or actively disengaged while 60% of employees are shown engaged. This means that in most of the organizations, there are 4 out of 10 employees who are disengaged. Meanwhile, Gallup (2013) revealed that there is only 30% of the people in America who hold full-time jobs are engaged and inspired at work. In other words, 70% of the population is disengaged. The 20% of the population who are active disengagement cost the U.S. an expected \$450 billion to \$550 billion every year. Apart from that, Effectory International (2014) reported that global engagement had improved worldwide from ranking 5.8 to 6.2. However, from the list of countries which had taken on the survey, Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore account for half of the lowest engagement countries. The inference can be made is the particular Asian countries are experiencing the lost derived from employee disengagement.

This is how the importance of engagement comes in. Other than contributes to the well-being of an employee, engaged employees also bring substantial benefits to an organization such as lowering employee turnover, improving organizational commitment, raising productivity and performance, and increase customer satisfaction (Lewis, R., Feilder, & Tharani, 2011; Rasheed, Khan, & Ramzan, 2013; Vance, 2006). These show that the efforts for engaging employees are vital to develop employees as well as the organization.

On the contrary, disengagement is the dark side of engagement which characterized by the withdrawal of employees physically or psychologically from their organization (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009). As defined by Kahn (1990), personal disengagement is the synchronized withdrawal of an individual during role performance which characterized by a lack of connections between physical, cognitive, and emotional with his job in an organization (Kahn, 1990).

The concept of disengagement raised up the issue of getting suitable boundary in the implementation of employee engagement strategies so that employees can be self-sustained while engaging with the organization (Macey et al., 2009). Meanwhile, burnout always referred to the response to chronic interpersonal stressors in the workplace. This response is the integration of the extreme exhaustion, feelings of doubt and job detachment, and a sense of incompetence and lack of accomplishment (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Hence,

employee engagement is at great risk if it is not sustainable in an organization and eventually lead to burnout of employees when employees cannot bear with the time and efforts paid for being engaged (Macey et al., 2009).

1.2 Problem Statement

There are substantial researches to study the factors affecting employee engagement had been performed, but the gaps are identified in the previous studies in terms of concept, methodology, location and population. The limitations and suggestions for future research are drawn from the previous studies and discussed in this section (Tang, 2014).

First, the gap identified from previous studies is the confusing conceptual definition of employee engagement. The various perspectives of engagement are presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1
Various Perspectives or Concepts of Engagement

Scholars	Perspective or Concepts of Engagement
Kahai (1990)	Psychological conditions of personal engagement which grouped into three major elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningfulness – sense of experiencing return on investment of self in role performance • Safety – sense of being capable to portray self without worry of negative consequences to self-image, status or career • Availability – sense of able to contribute physical, emotional and psychological resources in role performance
Macey and Schneider (2008)	Engagement associated with three forms of conceptualizations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State engagement – feelings of energy, absorptions • Trait engagement – positive views of life and work • Behavioural engagement – extra-role behaviour
Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees and Catenby (2010)	Engagement includes three core aspects which are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intellectual engagement - think hard how to do the job better • Affective engagement - feel good about doing a job • Social engagement - take chances actively to converse with others work-related improvements
Society for Human Resource Management (2012)	Access the level of engagement in three components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement Opinions – the “feelings” of engagement • Engagement Behaviour – the “look” of engagement • Engagement Conditions – the reason to engage
Aon Hewitt (2013)	Engagement is described into three elements which are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Say - tell about the organization positively to everyone • Stay - express strong sense of belonging and aspiration to be part of the organization • Strive - contribute efforts to ensure success in both their job and the company

As mentioned by Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane and Truss (2008) in their study, the existence of various explanations of employee engagement results in the abstract state of knowledge for employee engagement difficult to determine because every research studies employee engagement under different contexts. Thus, this research adopted the model of Kahn (1990) since he contributed the significant studies of personal engagement which is being used until now.

There is a gap identified in methodology because most studies which aim to identify the factors affecting employee engagement were carried out quantitatively. This may restrict the views or opinions of employees who are in different organizational context because questionnaire consists of a set of close-ended questions which allow respondents to answer in the perspectives of the questionnaire maker. Thus, the researcher decided to use qualitative research framework when designing the research in order to gain more insights of each drivers thorough verbatim data.

Besides, most of the studies regarding to employee engagement were executed by western countries or associations (Aon Hewitt, 2013; Effectory International, 2014; Mercer, 2012). Furthermore, there is no known study of employee engagement being carried out in a local university in Malaysia. Hence, the gap in terms of location can be fulfilled by carrying out the study on the factors affecting employee engagement in Malaysia. This may bring in new perspectives in the field of knowledge as there are always some differences portrayed in culture between Asia and Western countries.

In terms of population, Lewis et al. (2012) mentioned that the "limited experience and integration into organization" (p. 53) may results the willingness of employees to cooperatively reveal and share their views and experiences. Bearing this in mind, the researcher get to approach the population which has more opportunities to contact with. Thus, the sample derived from the population will not feeling awkward in sharing their ideas and experiences related to employee engagement.

Apart from that, the causes of disengagement always being neglected (Macey et al., 2009). Thus, the researcher aims to make the initial step in identifying whether academic staffs in the particular university experienced disengagement before and determining the reason for disengagement to occur.

1.3 Objectives

1.3.1 Main Objective

This research is focus on studying the characteristics of engagement among academic staffs, discovering the factors to engage academic staffs as well as discovering the possible challenges to engage academic staffs and the causes of disengagement.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- To study the engagement characteristics among academic staffs
- To identify factors to engage academic staffs
- To identify the challenges to engage academic staffs
- To identify the causes of disengagement

1.4 Research Questions

- What characteristics does employee perceived when he is engaged to his current organization?
- What are the factors that employees perceived will engage them to the current organization?
- What are the factors that employees perceived will challenge them to engage into their role performance?
- What are the causes of disengagement?

1.5 Definition of Terms

1.5.1 Engagement

- Conceptual definition:** the willingness of an individual to spend his efforts and time beyond the minimum requirements, to commit and work on task or job that is related to his employment under an organization, in order to ensure organizational success (Macey et al., 2009; Vance, 2006)
- Operational Definition:** the state whereby an individual is enthusiastically involved in his role performance while aligning personal targets with the organizational goals

1.5.2 Engagement Characteristics

- i. **Conceptual definition:** specific qualities or features that someone naturally have (“Characteristic”, 2015) when he is engaged
- ii. **Operational definition:** the perception of an individual which involves particular interior feeling and opinion that are uniquely possessed by the individual when he feels he is engagement

1.5.3 Academic Staff

- i. **Conceptual definition:** individual who involved in executing a prearranged range of academic duties, basically teaching which may include the duty to shape, design and deliver courses independently (Queen’s University, 1994)
- ii. **Operational definition:** individual serving under a faculty who qualified to conduct classes and deliver the content of courses to university’s students

1.5.4 Disengagement

- i. **Conceptual definition:** the condition whereby the trust between company and employees is compromised and employees feel unable or unwilling to be engaged (Macey et al., 2009).
- ii. **Operational Definition:** the state whereby an individual no longer interested or feeling unable to commit to the role or job that is assigned to him earlier

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the background and statement of problems are related to this research. There are four specific objectives have been established and followed by the development of research questions which are the cores that lead the direction of this research. Moreover, definitions of key terms used throughout this study were described in order to increase the understanding of readers who review this report.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the models related to employee engagement and followed by findings from previous research which are classified according to research questions of this study. The chapter is ended with a conclusion.

2.2 Models of Employee Engagement

There are numerous models have contributed in the knowledge of employee engagement. However, the researcher displayed and provided explanations on two models that she has taken on for this study. The first would be the model of Kahn (1990) on personal engagement and disengagement which is presented in Figure 2.1 as below.

Dimensions	Meaningfulness	Safety	Availability
Definition	Sense of return on investment of self in role performances	Sense of being able to show and employ self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career	Sense of possessing the physical, emotional, and psychological resources necessary for investing self in role performances
Experiential components	Feel worthwhile, valued, valuable; feel able to give to and receive from work and others in course of work	Feel situations are trustworthy, secure, predictable, and clear in terms of behavioral consequences	Feel capable of driving physical, intellectual, and emotional energies into role performances
Types of influence	Work elements that create incentives or disincentives for investments of self	Elements of social systems that create situations that are more or less predictable, consistent, and nonthreatening	Individual distractions that are more or less preoccupying in role performance situations
Influences	<p>Tasks: Jobs involving more or less challenge, variety, creativity, autonomy, and clear delineation of procedures and goals</p> <p>Roles: Formal positions that offer more or less attractive identities, through fit with a preferred self-image, and status and influence</p> <p>Work interactions: Interpersonal interactions with more or less promotion of dignity, self-appreciation, sense of value, and the inclusion of personal, as well as professional elements</p>	<p>Interpersonal relationships: Ongoing relationships that offer more or less support, trust, openness, flexibility, and lack of threat</p> <p>Group and intergroup dynamics: Informal, often unconscious roles that leave more or less room to safely express various parts of self; shaped by dynamics within and between groups in organizations</p> <p>Management style and process: Leader behaviors that show more or less support, resilience, consistency, trust, and competence</p> <p>Organizational norms: Shared system expectations about member behaviors and emotions that leave more or less room for investments of self during role performances</p>	<p>Physical energies: Existing levels of physical resources available for investment into role performances</p> <p>Emotional energies: Existing levels of emotional resources available for investment into role performances</p> <p>Insecurity: Levels of confidence in own abilities and status, self-consciousness, and ambivalence about fit with social systems that leave more or less room for investments of self in role performances</p> <p>Outside life: Issues in people's outside lives that leave them more or less available for investments of self during role performances</p>

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Figure 2.1. Personal engagement at work (Kahn, 1990)

In the study of Kahn (1990), he suggested there are three psychological conditions which namely psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability of employee which can affect individual’s work motivation intrinsically. In other words, these psychological conditions are contributing to the personal engagement or disengagement at work. Psychological meaningfulness was linked to rewards that employees perceived and experienced when they had personally engaged in their role. Psychological safety was related to the sense of safety that employees felt in their social working environment. Besides, psychological availability was associated to the feeling of capable in employees to contribute personal resources (in terms of physical, emotional or intellectual) while performing their work roles.

The second model that is being referred in this study is Aon Hewitt’s Engagement Model (Aon Hewitt, 2013). The model is displayed as Figure 2.2 as shown in below.

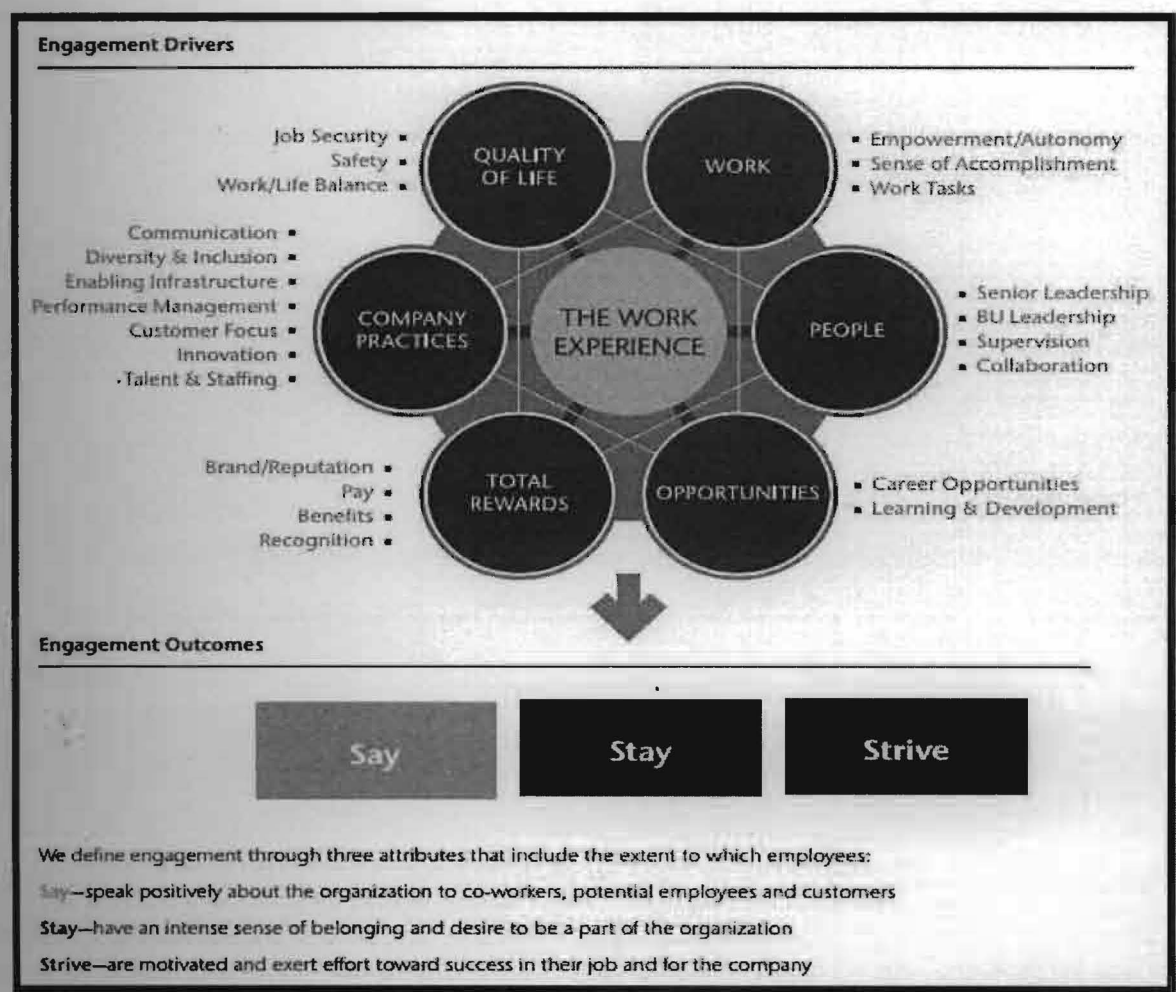


Figure 2.2. Aon Hewitt’s Engagement Model (Aon Hewitt, 2013)

In Aon Hewitt's Engagement Model, engagement is described as the integration of psychological and behavioural outcomes which improves the performance of employee (Aon Hewitt, 2013). This model studies organizational work experience which includes both the outcomes of individual's engagement and possible drivers of engagement. The term of "engagement" in this model is defined through three aspects namely say, stay, and strive.

The researcher choose to adopt these two models into this study because these two models are further used and validated by several researches conducted over years (Aon Hewitt, 2013; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Rothmann & Rothmann Jr, 2010).

2.3 Previous findings for engagement characteristics

The engagement characteristics were determined by referring several scholars who did relevant studies on engagement. The studies not including of engagement in model of Kahn (1990) and Aon Hewitt's Engagement model were not further elaborated as they were been explained earlier. Thus, these studies had provided opportunity for researcher to grasp the basic characteristics of engagement which involves satisfaction, assertive and willingness to contribute.

As reported by Effectory International (2014), engaged employees are having an experience of linking their work and gain energy in return. Thus, this statement shows that engaged employees are willing to put efforts to improve and develop themselves as they were empowered through working (Effectory International, 2014).

Besides that, Alfes et al. (2010) defined employee engagement into three components which are intellectual engagement, affective engagement and social engagement. Intellectual engagement involves the willingness of individual to think more about the job and make suitable improvements (Alfes et al., 2014). Affective management involves the sense of feeling good when you did great job. While social engagement is the assertive attitude that employee possessed to take initiative or opportunity for making discussion.

Meanwhile, Harter (as cited in Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014, p.107) mentioned that engaged employee are those who outperform their current job and set new targets consistently.

Furthermore, Macey and Schneider (2008) made engagement into three main constructs which are state, trait and behavioural. State engagement represents the feelings of having energy and adsorbing into the role in order to achieve standard performance. Trait

engagement involves the positive thoughts to balance life and work and behavioural engagement involves the willingness to contribute more than an individual's assigned role.

The listing of the characteristics of engagement will never come to an end as different scholars have different operation definitions for engagement. With recognition of that issue, Ferguson (as cited in Kular et al., 2008, p.3) questioned that whether the efforts to improve the knowledge state of employee engagement are applicable, unless there are universally defined and measurement of employee engagement. Thus, the core engagement characteristics can only be grasp after review numerous past studies.

2.4 Previous findings for factors to engage employees

In order to engage employees, the employer needs to create positive feeling among employees towards their organization as to shift the perceptions of neutral employees to positive in the beginning of employment (Lewis, Thomas, & Bradley, 2012).

A few researches which have been studied indicate that leader (managers, supervisors or seniors) is one of the drivers that influence employee engagement (Lewis, A. et al., 2012; Rasheed, Khan, & Ramzan, 2013; Stroud, 2009; Wiley, 2014). According to Lewis, A. et al. (2012), managers who considered as the common form of employees' leaders play a key role which will influence the capability of an induction process that encourages the engagement of employees. Meanwhile, Wiley (2012) suggested that leaders who inspire confidence in the future and managers who have prioritized in the recognition of employees and, committed to quality and improvements will are two of the major drivers which improve Employee Engagement Index. Besides, Stroud (2009) stated that the competency of a senior leader in terms of integrity, integrity, and collaboration and teaming contributes to the level of employees are being engaged in an organization. The study of Stroud (2009) also reported the contradictory results whereby an organizational leader's competence in self-awareness and adaptability is negatively related to his contribution of overall level of engagement in his organizational unit. Furthermore, Rasheed et al. (2013) found that perceived supervisor support is positively linked to job engagement and organizational engagement and will eventually contribute to increase the engagement level of employees.

On the other hand, there are several factors that contribute positively to employee engagement namely socialization, perceived organizational support, perceptions of procedural justice and distributive justice, exciting work and the availability of the opportunities of development, genuine responsibility portrayed by organizations towards their